

**At best, young mums are seen as unfortunate or ignorant, and at worst as irresponsible, careless and incapable of being good parents.**

Young women need to be able to make informed decisions about their lives, including the decision to end or continue a pregnancy. For some the decision may be tough. For others, having a baby may be a positive choice. Whatever the reasons a young woman has become pregnant, she should be supported to increase her choices and chances in life.

Young mums often face poverty and disadvantage which continue into later years. Yet many overcome these challenges and create happy and successful families, making important contributions to society and their communities.

YWCA England & Wales uses the terms **young mum**, **teenage mum** and **pregnant young woman** to refer to young women who become pregnant or have children at or before the age of 18.

- There are about 29,000 young mums aged 18 and under in England and Wales.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2002 the conception rate for girls aged 15 to 17 was 45.9 per thousand in Wales and 42.6 per thousand in England.<sup>2</sup>
- Pregnancies to women under 15 are a very small proportion of the total. In 2002 the conception rate was 7.9 per thousand young women aged under 16.<sup>3</sup>
- Young mums tend to live in deprived areas, inner cities, coastal and industrialised areas.<sup>4</sup>
- Young women from lower socio-economic groups are twice as likely to become teenage mums.<sup>5</sup>
- The majority of teenage parents live in poverty. Nearly half of teenage parents are in the bottom fifth of the income distribution.<sup>6</sup>
- In 2004 pregnant women aged under 18 can usually claim £33.50 in benefits per week to cover all expenses ex-

1 Teenage Pregnancy Unit, June 2004

2 *Conceptions (numbers and rates): by area of usual residence and age of woman, 2001*, in Health Statistics Quarterly, Number 17, Spring 2003, Office for National Statistics, (ONS) 2003

3 *Conceptions: age of woman at conception*, in Health Statistics Quarterly, Summer 2003, ONS, 2003

4 *Under 18 Conception rates by local authority district in England*, Office for National Statistics, 1997

5 Berthoud, R, Ermisch J. et al., *Long Term Consequences of Teenage Births for Parents & their Children*, Department of Health, 2003.

6 *DSS Analysis of data from Households Below Average Income Series 1996/7*, Department of Social Security, 1997.

7 *Pregnant Teenagers and Young Parents: a resources pack for advisors*, Teenage Pregnancy Unit/Maternity Alliance 2003, updated April 2004. Rates correct as of July 2004

8 *Pregnant Teenagers and Young Parents: a resources pack for advisors*, Teenage Pregnancy Unit/Maternity Alliance 2003, updated April 2004. Rates correct as of July 2004

9 *Pregnant Teenagers and Young Parents: a resources pack for advisors*, Teenage Pregnancy Unit/Maternity Alliance 2003, updated April 2004. Rates correct as of July 2004

## RESPECT young mums

**Respect** Young mums should be treated fairly and with respect

**Education** All young mums should get high quality education and training

**Services** All young mums should get support services to meet their needs

**Pounds and pence** All young mums should be entitled to an income they can live on

**Equality** Young mums should be entitled to equal rights and equal treatment

**Childcare** Every young mum should get affordable and flexible childcare

**Trust** Young mums should receive the recognition and trust they need

***“There is no evidence that teenage lone parents get pregnant to get housing and benefits”***

cept housing. This rises to £44.05 if they are living away from their parents. Pregnant women aged 18 and over automatically get £44.05 per week and those aged 25 and over get £55.65.<sup>7</sup>

- Once a young woman under 18 has her baby, the maximum benefits she can claim including child benefit and income support is £102.01 per week (or £112.56 if she is not living with her parents) whereas mothers aged 18 or over get a maximum of £124.16 per week.<sup>8</sup>
- Mums under 16 cannot claim benefits at all; child benefit for her and her child are paid to the young women's parents, or to her partner if he is over 18.<sup>9</sup>



- £20.25 is considered the bare minimum required for a 'modest but adequate' diet. A majority of pregnant teenagers living away from home say that they have less than this to spend on food each week.<sup>10</sup>

- There is no evidence that teenage lone parents get pregnant to get housing and benefits. Most have little knowledge of housing or social security policy before getting pregnant and what they do know often turns out to be wrong.<sup>11</sup>

- Seven out of ten 15 and 16-year-old mums and about half of 17 and 18-year-olds stay at home with their parents.<sup>12</sup>

- Fewer than half of Local Education Authorities can provide the full National Curriculum to young mums.<sup>13</sup>

- Half of education professionals think that young mums are not interested in education.<sup>14</sup> In fact, research shows that becoming pregnant and having a child increases young women's interest in education, and their determination to get a decent job.<sup>15</sup>

- The number of young women in care who have children young is disproportionately high. In one study almost half of the young women leaving care were mothers within two years.<sup>16</sup>

- Government has set two national targets about teenage pregnancy; firstly, to halve the under 18 conception rate in England by 2010, with an interim reduction target of 15% by 2004. Secondly, to increase the participation of teenage mothers in education, training or work to 60% by 2010. Government spent around £98million on their Teenage Pregnancy Strategy between 1999 and 2004.<sup>17</sup>

- Levels of teenage parents in education, employment and training reached 27.3% in 2003 compared with a level of 16% in 1997.<sup>18</sup>



- In general and contrary to popular opinion, teenage conception rates have been falling since the introduction of the strategy; however the most recent figures (2002) show a slight increase to 41,868 from 40,966 in 2001.<sup>19</sup>

- In 1970, young women aged 15 to 19 in England and Wales were almost twice as likely to become mums as they are today.<sup>20</sup>

## What people think about young mums

In July 2004, YWCA asked 1665 adults what they thought about young mums:

- 49% thought young mums get pregnant to get a council house
- 40% thought young mums get pregnant to get benefits
- 33% felt that age had an impact on a young woman's ability to be a mother
- 78% were not aware that pregnant women under 18 are entitled to lower benefits than those over 18
- 82% were not aware that pregnant teenagers in education were entitled to less statutory maternity leave than pregnant women in employment
- 62% were not aware of the poor standard of educational opportunities available to young mums

### But

- Only 19% felt that teenage pregnancy was caused by too much sex education, whilst 47% felt that young women became pregnant because they didn't have any ambitions to continue their education
- 83% thought that pregnant teenagers and young mums should have the same access to education and training as other teenagers and young women, and 85% thought that they should be eligible for benefits.

10 Burchett H. and Seeley A., *Good Enough to Eat? The diet of pregnant teenagers*, London, Maternity Alliance and Food Commission, 2003.

11 Allen, I and Bourke-Dowling, S., *Teen Mothers: Decisions and Outcomes*, Policy Studies Institute, 1998.

12 *Analysis of data on living arrangements from surveys on smoking and pregnancy 1994-1998*, Health Education Authority, 1998, cited in *Teenage Pregnancy*, Social Exclusion Unit, 1999.

13 *Survey of English Local Education Authorities into the educational provision for pregnant teenagers and young mothers up to the age of 16*, YWCA, 2004. Unpublished.

14 Dawson, N et al., *The education of pregnant young women and young mothers in England: vol. one*, Universities of Newcastle and Bristol, report to Teenage Pregnancy Unit, 2004. Unpublished.

15 Dawson, N and Meadows, S., *The education of pregnant young women and young mothers in England: a report on schools, special schools and professionals*. University of Bristol, report to Teenage Pregnancy Unit, 2004. Unpublished.

16 Biehal, N., Clayden, J., Stein, M. and Wade, J., *Moving On - Young People and Leaving Care Schemes*, 1995.

17 Written question to Secretary of State for Education and Skills. Volume 408, House of Commons Hansard, 7th July 2003, Col 632W

18 *Implementation of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Progress Report*, Teenage Pregnancy Unit, February 2004.

19 *Under 18 Conception Data for top-tier Local Authorities 1998-2002*, Office for National Statistics, 2004.

20 *Births 1938-2002: Maternities by age of mother, England & Wales*, Office for National Statistics, 2004. (dataset reference PBH34B)

All from *Too much too young? Understanding teenage pregnancy* YWCA 2004. For your copy of this 20-page report, price £4, phone 01865 304215.

### More YWCA documents:

- RESPECT young mums: young mums' charter – FREE
- Supporting young parents: Models of good practice – £12
- Power to choose: young women and sexual health – £4
- Making sense of the birds and the bees: sex and relationships education – FREE

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